

April 10, 2019

220

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

I write to you today concerning an issue of critical national importance: the Commission's implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

You most recently cited progress on this critical issue in a letter sent to me on December 31, 2018. At that time, you stated the Commission had already begun implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018. This law directs the Commission to coordinate with relevant agencies to study the feasibility of designating a simple, easy-to-remember, three-digit dialing code for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system and to produce a report recommending whether a particular three digit dialing code should be used and detailing the associated logistics and costs. This legislation — which passed the Senate unanimously — was an important step in the fight for the lives of Americans struggling with suicidal thoughts. But the success of these efforts depends on the timely action of the Commission.

As I noted in a December 17, 2018, letter to you and your fellow Commissioners, connecting with mental health services must be as easy a process as that of calling for law enforcement or emergency responders. Currently, those in need of help may seek out the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-Talk. This line has been an invaluable resource, but there is room to improve. After growing from just a few calls in its first year to more than 2 million in 2017 alone, it is long past time that the Commission establish a true lifeline dedicated just to the pressing issue of suicide crises. It remains my hope that the Commission will designate a simple, easy-to-remember, three-digit code as a Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline consistent with the intent of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act.

I want to again remind you of the very alarming statistics behind my December request. In 2017 alone, 47,173 died by suicide, and almost half a million Americans received medical care for self-inflicted injuries. And in my home state of Oregon, this crisis has reached dire proportions. This week, newsrooms throughout Oregon are shining a much-needed spotlight on death by suicide with a statewide "Breaking the Silence" reporting project to respond to this public health

crisis. For the past three decades, Oregon's suicide rates have been higher than the national average. Suicide kills more than 800 Oregonians a year.

These numbers are devastating. But, unfortunately, they are not isolated. Suicide rates in Oregon and across the country have steadily increased since 2000. From 2000 to 2017, Oregon's suicide rates increased 35 percent. It's clear this public health crisis is not going away, and, to put it in stark terms, the current system of help is nowhere near adequate. I believe strongly now, as I did in December, that the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) is a critical tool the Commission can use to improve to connect millions of Americans with life-saving resources and reverse this concerning trend. The good news is that we know from extensive research that crisis intervention works. Here in Oregon, the NSPL affiliate de-escalates nearly 95% of its calls without even the need to involve emergency services. It is absolutely critical that the Commission takes the appropriate steps to make these lifelines quickly reachable in times of crisis. As you advance your statutory mission, it is my hope — and expectation — that you will come to a similar conclusion.

Given the public interest in a study and report process that is both thorough and expedient, I urge you to keep your deadline of August 14, 2019. I appreciate your interest in this matter and look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

June 14, 2019

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

Thank you for your follow-up letter regarding the Commission's implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018. As you know, the Act directs the FCC to coordinate with the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the North American Numbering Council (NANC) in conducting a study examining the feasibility of designating a simple, easy-to-remember, three digit dialing code to be used for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system. The Act also requires us to produce a report recommending whether a simple, easy-to-remember, three-digit dialing code should be used for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system and, if so, the logistics and costs associated with designating such a dialing code, among other issues.

The Commission's Wireline Competition Bureau issued a Public Notice seeking input from interested stakeholders on the issues that the Commission must address in the study and the report required by the statute. In accordance with the statute, the Commission is also working closely with the SAMHSA, the VA, and the NANC as we carefully examine this important issue. SAMHSA and the VA conducted studies and provided reports to the Commission in February, and the NANC submitted its report in May.

Commission staff is reviewing these reports as well as comments filed by interested parties in the docket. The FCC will submit its report to Congress by the statutory deadline of August 14, 2019. Before implementing any recommendations from the report, the Commission would seek public input through a notice and comment proceeding. Interested parties would be invited to fully participate in that proceeding.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai".

Ajit V. Pai